

100-1-1007

APPENDIX G

FOOD MODIFICATION PROGRAM

1. Purpose. The food modification program is a problem solving technique used to enhance the "sniffing behavior" in detector dogs. It allows the handler to have complete control over the reward. Food should not be used in place of other rewards that motivate the dog, i.e., ball, "kong," or toy.

2. Background. The food modification program is used on food reward detector dogs experiencing a decline in search drive during detector training and use. The reward of food is not meaningful enough to some dogs to produce the optimum behavior when it knows it will be fed in the kennel anyway. Therefore, feeding the dog in the kennel is eliminated and the dog is only fed when responding to odors it was trained to detect during daily training evolutions. A conditioned stimulus based upon a survival instinct provides a strong motivator. Through the use of this program, the proficiency capabilities of detector dogs can be increased significantly.

3. Implementation. To implement the food modification program follow the below guidelines:

a. Initially, the dog will only be fed during training sessions and not in the kennel. Training will be conducted 7 days a week until the dog demonstrates a substantially increased "sniffing behavior" and all inconsistencies in performance are extinguished.

b. During detection training, the dog should be rewarded using small increments of the standard diet for each positive response. Any remaining food will be fed at the last training aid for the day.

c. The dog should be exposed to enough training aids during the day to allow for consumption of the normal daily ration.

d. Weekly weights will be maintained to ensure the dog remains within the prescribed working weight.

e. The training session should be terminated if the dog demonstrates a lessening in motivation/drive. To continue would result in the handler rewarding less than the optimum behavior.

f. The process is continued until the desired "sniffing" behavior is achieved, at which time, on non-training days, the dog can be fed in the kennel. Further feeding through training sessions only is extremely labor intensive to maintain. Avoid conducting short training sessions at the end of the day just to satisfy the food modification process. This conditions the dog to expect a training aid at short intervals, affecting its ability to conduct realistic searches for extended periods of time without false responding.